

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9269

INFO AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 3397

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SHUM, ET, ASEC

SUBJ: ETHIOPIAN SECURITY SITUATION HAS IMPROVED

REF: ADDIS ABABA 3339

SUMMARY. PROVISIONAL MILITARY ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL (PMAC OR DIRG) HAS MAINTAINED ITS POLICY OF TIGHT CONTROL OVER URBAN DWELLERS' ASSOCIATIONS ESTABLISHED IN MAY 78 AND THUS HAS CURTAILED GREATLY THE WORST ABUSES OF RED TERROR CAMPAIGN. THERE HAS BEEN AN IMPROVEMENT IN HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE AVERAGE URBAN RESIDENT OVER NOV 77 - APRIL 78 PERIOD, BUT THE PRESENT SITUATION DOES NOT REPRESENT AN APPRECIABLE IMPROVEMENT SINCE A YEAR AGO. WHETHER OR NOT THE DIRG ORDERS A MAJOR PRISONER RELEASE IN SEPTEMBER AS RUMORED, MAY BE A GOOD INDICATION OF THE DIRG'S SELF- CONFIDENCE AND MAY SERVE TO MAKE LIFE MORE TOLERABLE FOR MANY. END SUMMARY.

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1. CURTAILMENT AND NEAR ELIMINATION OF THE DIRG'S RED TERROR CAMPAIGN HAS CONTINUED TO PREVAIL SINCE MAY 78. THIS WAS FORCEFULLY DEMONSTRATED RECENTLY (JULY 28) WITH THE EXECUTION OF SIX URBAN DWELLERS' ASSOCIATION (DEBELE) OFFICIALS AND ONE OF THEIR ACCOMPLIES FOR "GROSS ABUSE OF POWER,

INCLUDING EXTORTION, RAPE, EMBEZZLEMENT AND IN-HUMAN TREATMENT OF KEBELE PRISON INMATES." ETHIOPIAN MEDIA DESCRIBED THESE CRIMES AS "TANTAMOUNT TO CONSPIRACY TO CREATE A RIFT BETWEEN THE BROAD MASSES, THE GOVERNMENT AND THE KEBELES." ALTHOUGH DIRG MEASURES AGAINST THE KEBELE OFFICIALS WERE SUMMARILY ADMINISTERED, A RELIABLE SOURCE HAS REPORTED AN EXTENSIVE INVESTIGATION WAS CONDUCTED BY DIRG SECURITY UNIT AND SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS WERE TAKEN TO ASSURE "PEACHFUL" ARREST OF THESE HEAVILY ARMED OFFICIALS.

2. SOURCE STATED THAT FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS OF KEBELE ABUSES ARE BEING PURSUED AND COULD RESULT IN MORE REVOLUTIONARY JUSTICE BEING METED OUT. IT IS NOT YET KNOWN WHETHER KEBELE INVESTIGATIONS ARE POLITICALLY MOTIVATED AGAINST MARXIST-LENINIST GROUPS OPPOSING DIRG RULE, OR IF THEY ARE SINCERE ATTEMPTS TO CORRECT PAST ABUSES AND REGAIN DEGREE OF POPULARITY AMONG URBAN DWELLERS. IN ANY CASE, IT IS CLEAR DIRG HAS REASSERTED ITS FULL AUTHORITY OVER A FORMERLY FREEWHEELING TYPE OF MASS ORGANIZATION (THE KEBELE) AND HAS GIVEN WARNING THAT IT IS PREPARED TO TAKE STRONG ACTION TO CORRECT AT LEAST THE MOST GROSS ABUSES.

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3. DIRG MEASURES TO CURTAIL SUMMARY KEBELE JUSTICE HAVE BEEN WELL-RECEIVED BY MAJORITY OF URBAN POPULATION. HAVING ELIMINATED THE ETHIOPIAN PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY PARTY (EPRP) EUBAN TERRORIST THREAT, IT APPEARS KEBELES ARE ATTEMPTING TO EMPHASIZE THEIR SOCIA-ECONOMIC ROLE RATHER THAN THEIR SECURITY ONE. EXAMPLES ARE: KEBELE COOPERATIVE SHOPS FOR GRAIN, SUGAR, SALT AND SOAP DISTRIBUTION, NEIGHBORHOOD ROAD REPAIR PROGRAMS AND POLITICAL Indoctrination CLASSES.

4. DESPITE THESE POSITIVE IMPROVEMENTS SINCE THE HEIGHT OF THE RED TERROR CAMPAIGN, DAILY POLITICAL ARRESTS CONTINUE AND RELIABLE SOURCES REPORT THAT POLITICAL EXECUTIONS ARE STILL OCCURRING, ALBEIT MORE CLANDESTINELY. PRISON CONDITIONS WITHIN DEBELES AND REGULAR POLICE AND MILITARY DENTENTION AREAS HAVE NOT IMPROVED. PRISONS ARE STILL EXTREMELY CROWDED WITH INADEQUATE SANITARY FACILITIES. BEATINGS, WHILE SOMEWHAT REDUCED FROM NEAR-TORTURE PROCEDURES OF RED TERROR, ARE STILL COMMON PRACTICE DURING ARRESTS AND INVESTIGATIONS,

AS THEY ARE IN BRAZIL, FOR EXAMPLE.

5. THUS, WHILE THERE HAS BEEN AN IMPROVEMENT IN THE GENERAL HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE AVERAGE URBAN RESIDENT SINCE THE GROSS ABUSES OF RED TERROR WERE CURTAILED IN MAY, THERE HAS NOT BEEN AN APPRECIABLE IMPROVEMENT OF INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS SINCE ONE YEAR AGO. (IN APRIL 1977 THE DIRG ALSO EXECUTED 5 KEBELE OFFICERS FOR SIMILAR ABUSES).
THERE IS A WIDESPREAD RUMOR THAT THE DIRG WILL RELEASE (ON THE 4TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE REVOLUTION SEPT 12), A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF POLITICAL PRISONERS WHO WERE ARRESTED DURING THE FIRST TWO AND ONE-HALF YEARS OF THE REVOLUTION. IF THIS
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OCCURS, IT WILL DEMONSTRATE THAT THE DIRG NOW FEELS SELF-CONFIDENT ENOUGH NOT TO FEAR THESE INDIVIDUALS AND MAY NEED TO REHABILITATE "REACTIONARY" POLITICAL PRISONERS WHOM IT MAY DESPERATELY NEED NOW TO RUN THE CIVILIAN BUREAUCRACY.
IT WOULD ALSO BE THE FIRST MAJOR PRISONER RELEASE IN OVER A YEAR.
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